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The place of adult education in education policy at the local level

| Education policy at the local level

Education policy is one of the areas of social policy, and generally speaking, there is the whole range of problems concerning the education system and the organization of the education and upbringing processes. Just as social policy, education policy can be understood as a practical activity and scientific discipline. According to A. Kurzynowski (2003), education policy as a scientific discipline is interested in setting optimal principles for the dissemination of education among children, adolescents and adults to prepare them for life, profession and active participation in culture. Education policy understood as a practical activity is state measures aimed at implementing teaching and education goals, securing the material and technical functioning of the adopted education system and managing institutions involved in this area. As quoted above, education policy understood as a theoretical activity refers to adults as a group that falls within the scope of this science topic area, but the practice of education policy focuses mainly on children and youth.

The Education Act of 1991 and the Local Government Act of 1990 specify the education tasks of local government. Among a commune's own tasks is to meet the collective needs of a community, which involves the obligation to organize education in the commune, including primary schools, kindergartens and other education institutions.

In particular, a commune's own tasks include issues related to:

- ensuring conditions for the functioning of a school or institution, including safe and healthy learning, upbringing and care environment;
- conducting overhauls of school facilities and investment projects in the area;
- providing administrative, financial and organizational support for a school or institution;
- equipping a school or institution with teaching aids and devices necessary for the full implementation of curricula, education programmes, tests and examinations and other statutory tasks (The Education Act, Journal of Laws of 1991, No. 95, item. 425).

Local government education policy should define local education priorities and develop an adequate long-term plan of action. The basis for the education policy development at the communal level is an overall concept of local community civilization development and directions of the socioeconomic development. This is where pedagogical intentions designed in schools should be derived from to support the widely understood development of a local community.

Communal education policy should also take into account:

- state education policy (e.g. the prevalence and availability of education, education of teachers, education reforms);
- expectations of participants of education processes at the local level (e.g. developing skills that will enable students to find employment in a local labour market);
- development needs of education institutions in a local community.

Local development is usually defined by the prism of political, economic and infrastructural achievements in the area. However, due to the fact that social sciences become interested in the category of development, attention is increasingly often drawn to its cultural and social dimension. It is said that local development should be used to solve local problems (social, economic, political, cultural, ethnic) and create conditions for satisfying individual and collective needs, with the involvement of residents.

The guiding principle of local development is local work for a local community using local resources (Potoczek, 2001). This means both: creating favourable conditions for social mobilization and using this activity for the creation and control of developmental processes, including the creation of a climate for developing entrepreneurship, stimulating innovation, promoting sustainable development, overcoming barriers, improving “quality of life” and the efficient use of local resources (Birkhölzer, 2006).

Local development activities should therefore as far as possible address the common good rather than individual benefits; produce both goods and services, but also renew environmental, social and cultural resources indispensable for further development; meet unmet needs, i.e. provide goods and services to all

local groups of interest, especially marginalized groups with weaker purchasing power, not just the privileged groups and those having free access to social services; strengthen local social capital, focus on the development of a community (Birkhölzer, 2006).

The basic aims and objectives of local community development by the standards of the National Standards Boards for Community Work Training & Qualification are:

- developing joint activities, i.e. establishing and supporting civic groups;
- improving access to information and knowledge;
- acquiring or creating new material resources;
- increasing citizen participation in decision-making processes (Skrzypczak, 2001).

Local education policy development should be based on the recognition of local needs and opportunities in the field of education in order to create appropriate financial, administrative and organizational conditions for multilateral development of local residents. One of the main goals of education policy should be to equalize education opportunities, which should relate specifically to adults. In the area of vocational training, it is important to prepare a sufficient number of personnel in various professions and specialties that then can be used by the economy and respond to its needs in order to reduce unemployment.

Owing to the project *Local Government Education Policy* (LGEP) implemented by the Centre for Citizenship Education, the purpose of which was to support local governments in the development of education policy planning procedure, urban as well as urban and rural communes more often make an effort to create an education development strategy in their area, but most rural communes do not conduct this type of activity. Education and especially adult education in local communities has to compete with other areas of socio-economic life. The position of adult education in local communities depends largely on local development policy the determinants of which are included in planning documents, i.e. local development strategies.

| Local development strategy

A development strategy is a broad plan of setting and achieving public goals; it is a general concept (plan) of systemic, long-term action taken by authorities in view of opportunities and threats arising from the changing environment and measures taken by other actors, according to values and options accepted by a local community, based on the internal potential of strengths and taking into account internal weaknesses (Sołtys, Lendzion, 2010).

A local development strategy is a development scenario for a commune, county or city, specifying, among others: the target vision of the development, strategic and operational development goals, strategic tasks and the way of their implementation. According to the EU Directive, each unit of local government should base its investment activities co-financed by the European Union on a strategic plan. Therefore a development strategy is now one of the most important source documents in the functioning of local government units, indicating strategic development directions of a unit for the next several years.

A development strategy is a part of the local development policy, and according to A. Noworól (2007) – one of the elements of local government management. It covers primarily planning and efforts for the so-called territorial marketing, the essence of which is to attract investors to a commune and to promote the commune in order to attract tourists.

A strategy is now referred to as the main determinant of success and proper development of an organization in the long run. A strategy can also be the result of adaptive, somewhat intuitive behaviours of an organization and its manager in the face of challenges posed by changing circumstances (then it is referred to as a reactive strategy). However, a deliberate strategy, i.e. developed during a strategic planning process, is more advantageous.

A local community development strategy should be characterized by:

- sustainable goals and action measures;
- openness to external opportunities;
- displaying the attractiveness of a community and its immediate environment;
- active use and strengthening of internal resources and capabilities.

A strategy must be designed to match a specific, individual situation of a local community and specific time of its implementation; it is also an expression of social consensus (Sołtys and Lendzion, 2010).

The entity responsible for a strategy is a territorial community, represented by new, democratically appointed authorities who apply democratic management principles and serve as a control entity. However, they control just a certain part of reality. It is indirect control that dominates – through interaction with other bodies. Such control involves policies in specific areas. To make the policies effective, it is necessary to base them on the above mentioned “deliberate” strategy, prepared jointly with other (social, economic) entities with whose cooperation these policies can be implemented. Thus, the entity responsible for territorial policy is also the entity in charge of a strategy (Sołtys and Lendzion, 2010).

The main task of a development strategy is to build the socioeconomic potential, i.e. to transform a local community structure in order to improve the short- and long-term quality of life, that is to meet diverse needs of a community at increasingly higher levels; to increase (or at least sustain) the rich diversity of

resources for further development, to minimize adverse effects on a community and offer external benefits to others. A strategy should include:

- the time horizon of its impact;
- a list of problems to solve due to the diagnosis of a community;
- hierarchical objectives and priority areas;
- suggested ways and appropriate instruments to achieve the objectives;
- financial frameworks and funding sources for individual actions;
- strategic record monitoring and evaluation project.

The document can be divided into two major parts. The first one is a reliable diagnosis of a community's potential, and the second one relates to the projection of measures that can be taken, based on the catalogued potential. The essence of a strategy for an area, including a local community, involves:

- a holistic, comprehensive approach to a subject and purposes;
- diagnosing key issues – current and anticipated in the future;
- objectives formulated by autonomous entities;
- sequences of actions aimed at the consistent achievement of objectives;
- focusing means on a limited bundle of goals;
- flexibility of measures and variability of planned activities in a situation of uncertainty and volatility of a community and measures taken by many entities;
- significant, long-lasting or even irreversible effects of measures (Sołtys and Lendzion, 2010).

Local entities (especially authorities) should be actively involved in developing a strategy not only to make it the most effective (based on their reflections and decisions), but also to prepare themselves for its independent revision and development of its new variants in the future, and skilful implementation and execution thereof (making strategic decisions in communal development management) (Sołtys, Lendzion, 2010).

Entities important in constructing a strategy are:

- representatives of the highest local authorities;
- representatives of local organizations and communities;
- representatives of political organizations;
- representatives of businesses and local institutions important for a community;
- representatives of professional groups important in the area;
- people with high activity or social position (role models), e.g. local authorities, local leaders;
- representatives of external institutions crucial for a community development.

This list is probably not complete, because each community has a different set of significant people and institutions, but as many people as possible should be involved in developing this type of documents. The widest possible range of citizens should also participate in the so-called public consultation on a strategy.

Reference literature presents different models or ways of working on a local development strategy. This can be made independently by a local government, the work can be assigned to experts or a mixed approach using the local potential of people and expert knowledge can be adopted.

Experience shows that the best development strategies are created this way. If people from outside are employed to develop a strategy, documents often do not match the actual realities of a community. Strategies developed by a commune, however, have many shortcomings, errors, and often neglect the basic principles of management.

Works on a local development strategy and the creation of such a document brings many benefits. A local community is thus better prepared to deal with a rapidly changing environment. Thanks to the works on a strategy, problems can be anticipated before they arise and the existing ones can be solved. They also facilitate a political dialogue between a community and local authorities, and mobilize all citizens to act for the benefit of a local community. With a development strategy, a local community can more easily obtain funds from the Structural Funds. A development strategy also enables better use of resources existing in a community, and may attract foreign investors.

| The place of adult education in selected | local development strategies

In order to verify the place of adult education issues in local development strategies, 30 local development strategies were analysed. The analysed strategies included 10 development strategies for urban and rural communes, as well as 20 development strategies for rural communes located in south-eastern Poland.

All analysed strategies emphasize the importance of education for the development of the social potential of their communities, however, education refers mainly to children and adolescents, while adults are extremely rarely a direct target group of education measures taken. Meanwhile there are a lot of references that can be considered to construct a broad context for education activities aimed at adults. The content analysis of local development strategies made it possible to create a kind of education strategy profiles which can involve supporting adult education.

The first group of strategies focuses on investing in nature and landscapes of a region, because they are believed to be the impetus for economic and social revival of a commune. Local government focuses on the development of tourism which is to contribute to the education activity of a local community.

Other development strategies consider adult education as a component called “cultivating tradition and preserving cultural heritage.” Here, the main dimension of education is regional and community education, largely addressed to children and adolescents. It is non-governmental organizations that take care of adults in this area, and in addition to local education institutions, they can carry out the thus defined objective.

Another group of strategies identifies the problems of education in the context of developing professional skills and providing education. The measures proposed here are also relevant to the education of children and young people, adapted to the modern requirements of the labour market. Adult education boils down to offers of courses and trainings in the field of agriculture and agritourism, and raising European funds.

Another group of strategies emphasizes social mobilization of residents by creating conditions for the development of non-governmental organizations in a community. Attention is even drawn to an increased use of school buildings beyond the didactic cycle for the purposes of the whole community (schools as education centres in rural areas).

Other strategies (especially development strategies for communes) combine the education development of a community with the prevention of social exclusion. Increasing the level of education among residents is to serve the social and professional reintegration of the socially excluded. These strategies also place emphasis on promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Many of the analysed strategies involve development, maintenance and modernization of the existing social infrastructure, particularly in the fields of education, culture and sport. The need to create a wide range of secondary education, also for adults, is often emphasized. Some urban communes want to create a university in their area, provide access to broadband Internet in the territory of their commune, expand the offer of lifelong learning and increase participation in culture. The projects rarely contain precise measures that would lead to the implementation of these plans.

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The absence of issues of lifelong learning, adult education or generally negligible visibility of social matters is due to:

- the absence of representatives of the sector in constructing the discussed documents (among communal managers are engineers, technologists, economists);
- the fact that advisors and experts who help local authorities, such as Regional Development Agencies and Institutions of Local Government and Administration are also specialists not much involved in social sciences;

- the fact that local community members are unaware of the importance of the documents of local development strategies, which is why they do not participate in the so-called public consultations;
- the fact that these documents are considered by a community as “extra-neous,” since created by a stranger, i.e. by some authorities, even if they are local authorities;
- the low level of social capital, and thus trust, civic cooperation and communication at the local level;
- the fact that education, and especially adult education in local communities, has to compete with other areas of socioeconomic life (infrastructure, social sphere, etc.).

| Conclusion

The author of the report *Education Strategies of Local Governments in Poland* argues that “(...) local education in Poland involves more strategies (defined as documents) than strategic planning (defined as the systematic execution of measures to achieve a set objective) (...)” (Sobotka, 2011, p. 3). The shortcoming of most of the analysed local development strategies is also handling strategic objectives in the absence of operational objectives which would clarify demands contained in strategic objectives.

The discussed local development strategies contain few education contexts, which places this area at the margins of strategic planning in local communities and at the same time local government policy. Education of children and young people is emphasized to a greater or lesser extent in almost every local development strategy, while adult learners are mostly left to their own devices.

Local development strategies can be divided into two main groups. The first one identifies local development with economic development and infrastructure, and pays particular attention to these issues. The second group is based to a greater extent on a social component. These strategies are more focused on education issues, and more often emphasize the importance of adult education.

Education issues are strongly emphasized at the regional level (province) where separate planning documents are developed in the form of regional education development strategies. At the local level, such documents are rare, so the presence of education issues in local development strategies is very important.

The analysis of the selected planning documents indicates that the education policy addressed to adults at the local level involves measures aimed primarily at promoting social/civic activities, professional activation and a wide support for various disadvantaged groups.

It is indisputable that today lifelong learning is situated to a great extent in the life environments of individuals, and the condition of this education in local communities largely depends on a local social policy and local development policy. Therefore, educators interested in adult education should more often analyse these issues.

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